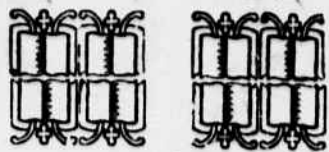


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The Third of a Series of Complete Stories by L. J. Beeston.



that you made, from the very beginning of this extraordinary case, a profound error. I do not believe that the man who was undoubtedly murdered was your cousin Lionel at all."

The fugitive from justice started as if struck. "Not Lionel?" he echoed. "No, I feel not. I think he was just merely some poor nameless devil of a tramp, horribly hungry, or very ill, who tried to force a way into your house."

"Impossible. He said he was Lionel," burst out the other.

"I disagree. He said nothing of the sort. You asked him if he was, and he made a murmur or sign of assent. Of course he did. That was to avoid being charged with housebreaking. Despite his condition he kept his wits together."

"But—but I recognized him!" stammered Hambro.

"I disagree again. You plainly said that you had seen very little of your cousin. Now since he had been left that great property you had naturally thought about him a great deal. He had vanished utterly. Was he dead? Would he ever come back? Vital questioning for you who were separated from a fine fortune by this one mysterious life. You dreamed Lionel. You took him with your meals. You were already prepared possibly for a queer return as his disappearance had been. And when that nameless wretch fell into your conservatory the thought of your relative rushed into your mind. Besides, you said he had cut himself with the glass, and blood from his face would assist rather than check your imaginative recognition. Also very possibly some likeness did exist."

"At this juncture I cut in with—'Wrong, Tredways. You have forgotten the love letter and the ring with the lock of hair.'"

"Which the poor fellow knew nothing about," was the cool answer. "They were put where they were found in order that he might seem to be Lionel Hambro without doubt; in order that when dead—for at that time he was believed to be dying—he might be buried under that name. Yet he did not die a natural death, for he was murdered. Who murdered him? Some single member of a secret society of miscreants having its headquarters in the city of Prague, which is famous for that sort of vermin."

"That Lionel Hambro was once connected with such a fraternity I feel certain. His mysterious doings in that city might be a poor argument; a much stronger is afforded by that abrupt farewell of his to society. Remember, Francie, that I know something of those rodents, those earth-burrowing brotherhoods. There was one rooted out three months back called 'The Upas.' When one of themselves deserted or, realizing the more than doubtful methods of the fraternity, attempted to give information to the authorities, they did two things to him: They fired a pistol ball through the center of his left hand, making a clean hole there by way of brand; and they sentenced him to lasting banishment from every lane of life in which he had moved. The condemned had to cut adrift from every one he had known and to leave his country for good. Any attempt at return was met by death."

"I believe that Lionel Hambro suffered this sentence. It fits the facts. He vanished without a word of explanation save that brief line of good-bye to his fiancée. Suddenly, in the person of this unknown derelict, he seemed to have turned up. The thing was talked about. Doubtless the medical man chatted of it a good deal. It swiftly reached the ears of Lionel's enemies, one of whom was naturally nearby on the watch that Lionel should not return to claim his fortune. This emissary struck. He entered the sick man's room. There was no need for violence. He found the phial of tincture of opium, and he used it. He worked in the dark, remember. He had no proper sight of the patient, but then he had no reason to doubt."

"But the letter in his pocket; the ring; the lock of hair?" I persisted. "Who put them there?"

"At that instant we heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Hambro rose to his feet, very white, the fear of capture staring out of his eyes. But Tredways went on, very steadily: 'Who put them there? Kellman did. Now another reason why I am sure the murdered man was not Lionel Hambro is because the disfigurement of a hole in the middle of his left hand was not noticed, and simply because it was not there. If it had been it must have been observed. Now that Lionel was so branded I have sure proof. What might a man do who was so marked and who particularly wished to conceal the place? He would fill the orifice with a piece of wool which he would cover with a circular piece of yellow—flesh-colored—sticking plaster.' "And such a fragment was found in his pocket!" I burst out.

"Precisely. It was rubbed off accidentally from the very hurried hand which placed the letter and ring there. The owner of that hand was

Lionel Hambro; and unless I am deplorably mistaken—" Tredways stepped to the door and flung it open—"here is the gentleman!"

"Kellman!" cried Stacey in the gasping tone of a strangling man. The man who entered became as motionless as if transformed to marble. He fixed on the fugitive a look of heart-stopping astonishment.

"One and the same," said Tredways blandly. "Slightly disguised so that you should never recognize him, my poor friend. Good evening to you, Mr. Lionel Hambro. If you will be so good as to remove that short beard, those eyebrows and to show us your left palm? Thank you. My case is complete, gentlemen."

"In persuading Stacey Hambro to give himself up to the police," said my friend as we re-entered his rooms an hour later, "you did the only possible thing. But I feel pretty confident that we shall clear him before many days. Twenty minutes to midnight. It's late. Hadn't you better go, Francie?"

"When I have asked you one or two questions, yes."

He yawned and stirred the fire.

"How did you know that Kellman was Lionel Hambro?"

"Some one had put those things in the pocket where they were found. Who was there to do it save Kellman? Stacey had made him out so mysterious a customer. There was depth in him, I felt sure. He put them in during the minute when Stacey was outside in the hall,

flinging up the doctor. He believed at that time that the man was surely dying. He wanted his enemies to think that their victim was under ground. The idea was good, you will allow."

"But after his banishment why did he run the big and strange risk of becoming a manservant to his cousin?"

"It was a wily move, believe me. Do you remember Poe's story of the purloined letter which no one could find because it was all the time openly in view in a letter rack on a mantelpiece? The same idea. Lionel came to the last place where he would have been considered likely to show himself. His disguise did the rest. But his greatest reason was that he wanted to be near to Maudie Frere."

"Who is still in America, however."

"Fiddlesticks. I have little doubt that she is the supposed 'sister' with whom he resides. I expect they are man and wife. She passes as sister in order to allay possible suspicion of the Upas. She must have been back some time. Of course she knows all. She has been a splendid friend."

"I cannot agree. She should have made him declare himself openly."

"Pardon; you do not know the Upas—more deadly than a maleficent cancer of the worst kind."

"That is all very fine, but Lionel Hambro let his cousin go to prison for killing a man who was never dead."

"Delightfully put! But you err, Francie, you err. There cannot be the smallest doubt that Lionel believed that

his cousin did administer that fatal dose of laudanum. He did not penetrate as deeply into the riddle as we. Indeed, to him it was no riddle at all. It was simply that his relative had put an end to a man who he thought was between him and a great property. If Lionel had revealed himself afterward it could scarcely have helped his cousin, since killing is killing; while it would have assuredly brought upon his own head the hidden fate that menaced him. The Upas would have made no second mistake! Anything else? I am really horribly tired."

"How can you establish Stacey Hambro's innocence?"

"If you will open that drawer you will find full notes on my forthcoming book, 'The Nether Steeps.' Its fourth chapter is devoted to the extermination of pestilent secret fraternities. That section treats of the clever rooting-up, three months ago, of the once-dreaded Society of the Upas. There are no fewer than forty-five of its most prominent members now in prison. That one or more of them will accept alleviation of sentence by speaking the entire truth of the murder of the supposed Lionel Hambro I have but little doubt. That it will be an enormous relief to that gentleman to know that he is henceforth safe from his enemies goes without saying. He will certainly act very handsomely toward Stacey. Perhaps he will give him half the property. I hope he will. He ought to—Good night, my dear Francie. Good night."

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The Withered Flowers By Binet-Valmer

(Translated from the French by William L. McPherson.)

IT WAS raining, and the wind was blowing hard. The squall beat against the ruined walls of the church and leaves fell in heaps on the graves below. The cemeteries of the Ourre have a sadder air than the cemeteries of the Aisne. They are four years old.

I am speaking of a cemetery which is near a still unreconstructed church. There are monuments there, chiseled tombstones, crowns and inscriptions, most of which prove how difficult it is to express appropriately the sense of grief. There are some graves without markings or decorations. The fields near by the cemetery are cultivated. The hamlet is full of life. The peasants pursue their toil. They have rebuilt their homes, but they haven't rebuilt their hearts. Perhaps they don't want to forget?

"Madame! Mademoiselle! Get up; try to pull yourself together." She was stretched out across a pathway, her head against a plot railing. The rain fell in torrents on the poor creature—the poor black thing.

It is a distressing spectacle—a woman fainting in a cemetery.

I took her in my arms and carried her to shelter within the church. The wind tossed her wrap over her head. The rain blinded me. I didn't see her face.

"Madame! Mademoiselle!"

"What is it?"

"You lost consciousness. I picked you up."

She opened her eyes. Later I saw that she was very homely, excessively thin; her cheek bones standing out, her forehead bulging. She had an unhealthy appearance, a yellow complexion and hair without a suggestion of posity. But at that moment there was a certain posity in her expression.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur. My mind is a blank. Where am I? Ah! It's the church in the cemetery. My poor lost ones!"

She was very young—not more than twenty. I thought: "She is already a widow." Again she said: "My poor lost ones!"

"Your brothers?"

"No, my fiancé and the others."

I had carried her into what remained of the sacristy. I rolled up my coat to make her a pillow.

"Tell me what happened to you."

"I want to go home."

That wasn't possible. She was too weak.

"Wait until the shower is over."

"Who are you?"

"A soldier, an officer. I came to pray at the grave of one of my men."

"What was his name?"

I told her the name. She answered: "I didn't know him. I was praying at the grave of the four chasseurs—at the big grave, you know."

"I do. There is a single stone with four names on it."

"They were buried together, just as they lived together. One of them was my fiancé, and the other three were engaged to my three girl friends. We had known one another since childhood. We were from the same village. We were to be married the same year. Then the war came. Helene, Renee, Marie and I accompanied them to the station. Two months afterward all were dead, and all

four of us were left widows before we had even married."

"We set out from our village to recover their bodies. We searched this part of the country until we found them. We paid for the monument. Their relatives remained down there, in the Jura. We couldn't return. It was too far away from them. The other girls loved them then as I love them still. I have nothing against my three companions. They, too—the dead—have nothing against them. They understand."

"At first we remained together. We worked for a living in Paris. Helene was a saleswoman, Renee a lady's maid. Marie, who had a little money, learned to write on a typewriter. I made hats. We came here every week. We brought flowers. We wept. We were loyal. But the springtime changed things. Helene is pretty. Renee is a beauty. Marie is a striking blond. They have forgotten. Not all at once. Each month they accompanied me at least once, but I saw that they did it grudgingly. They were accomplishing a duty. They no longer came because they couldn't stay away. Afterward they came because they were ashamed not to come. I kept saying, 'You can't desert them.'"

"But one day Helene answered, 'Oh, you bore me.' It was in May and the lilacs were in bloom. I told Renee and Marie. They took my side and all that summer we three came, making excuses to Jacques, whom Helene had abandoned. The next winter Renee suffered greatly from the cold. She told me, 'I can't go with you any longer.' Neither Marie or I blamed her; but we asked Pierre to pardon her."

"The Gothas and the Zeppelins bombarded Paris. Marie is timid. She went home to the Jura and found another fiancé; so I had to ask Francois to forgive her. Perhaps they envied Pierre, to whom I shall never be false. You understand. I am homely. He loved me in spite of that, and he was the handsomest of them all. Our four friends! They went away singing. I am going to rejoice them. But life is long."

"You found me in the pathway. I thought I should never wake up. For an hour I had talked to them. I called to them, 'Where are you? I am not much of a believer and I haven't even this consolation, I don't know where they are. I live alone. Helene and Renee don't want to know me any longer. To them I wouldn't be a figure of remorse. Marie doesn't like to me and my family say that I am a fool to stay on here in Paris, where I can't make a living. That is true. I don't eat every day. And this week I couldn't bring them any flowers.'"

She hid her face with her arm. Her sleeve was almost worn through at the elbow.

Ah, cemeteries of our great battles. What a setting you furnish for dramas more human than any the poets have ever invented! "The dead go quickly," said Lafargue. Poor dead and poor shriveled flowers! There is so much springtime in the life of a young girl!

"And your comrade, monsieur, did you love him well?"

The rain had ceased, swept away by the gale. I told her the story of my little soldier. The poor girl told me the story of the four little chasseurs.

"Thank you," she cried. "We women—one can never tell. You men are better than we are."

homely. I went with her to the station. I accompanied her to Paris. I took her address. But when I went to see her I didn't find her. She was at the hospital. Afterward I visited her there.

"Well, you have been sick?"

"I hope—"

And her glance seemed to travel toward the distant cemetery.

Then she fumbled under her pillow and drew out a humble purse.

"It's all that I have left, and it's for them."

That is why four chasseurs, resting in a single grave, receive a visit from me as often as I can make one—in a cemetery in the suburbs of Paris, where the heroes of the first victory of the Marne sleep.

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'Ikky Comes Along.

(Continued from Third Page.)

Auntie, "I might use the same expressions—if I knew how."

"Hip, hip, for Auntie!" I sings out.

"And as for your not knowin' how, that easy fixed Ikky-boy and I will give you lessons."

And say, after he'd finished his play and was about ready to be tucked into his crib, what does the young jollier do but climb up in Auntie's lap and cuddle down folksy, all on his own motion.

"Do you like your old Auntie, Richard?" she asks, smoothin' his red curls 'entle.

"Uh-huh," says Ikky-boy, blinkin' up at her mushy. "Oh's a swell Auntie."

Are we back in the will again? I'll guess we are.

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Shifting the Scenery.

SIR HARRY LAUDER golfs with more enthusiasm than skill, and one day on the links he was in unusually bad form.

At the fourth hole Sir Harry lodged an unusually large sod. The sod rose up into the air and sailed like a great bird down the wind, and Sir Harry's caddy, watching it, said to his companion:

"Did you tell me that guy was an actor, Pete?"

"Sure, Bill," said the other caddy, a note of apology in his voice. "An actor—that's what they call him."

The first caddy took a thoughtful chew of tobacco.

"I'd call him a scene shifter," he said.

The Poet's Difficulty.

PROF. BRANDER MATTHEWS said at a Columbia tea:

"The mathematical mind can't appreciate poetry. You remember the mathematician who began Tennyson's stirring 'Half a league, half a league, half a league—' and then put down the volume contemptuously, muttering: 'If the fellow means a league and a half why can't he say so?'"

"Another mathematician listened to a minor poet reciting one of his own songs—a song that said the poet's body was in the office, but his soul was in the country, communing with nature."

"Asked afterward what he thought of the song, the mathematician said: 'Well, that poet isn't the first one who couldn't keep body and soul together.'"